



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 19 January 1968

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4. Laos

Souvanna is keeping cool, but even he is not yet aware of the extent of government losses at Nam Bac. So far, only about a third of the troops that had been defending the town have drifted back to government positions. The losses in military equipment are probably considerable.

Demands for a scapegoat may become hard to resist, but up to now the anger in Vientiane is directed mainly against the flagrant North Vietnamese violations of Laotian neutrality. Late Wednesday night the North Vietnamese Embassy in Vientiane was the target of some hand grenades.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam



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19 January 1968

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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
for the President's Eyes Only

19 January 1968

I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Hanoi Orchestration of the Trinh Statement:
North Vietnam seems to have mounted a full-blown propaganda effort to press its proposal for a cessation of US bombing and is stressing its willingness to enter early talks with the United States in return. Hanoi radio, for instance, now has endorsed the 16 January interview of its man in Paris, Mai Van Bo, by rebroadcasting it on the 18th.

Bo gave another interview on 17 January in which he apparently was even more forthcoming. He continued to reject the concept of Hanoi making any reciprocal military gesture to get the bombing stopped. In discussing President Johnson's San Antonio formula, however, Bo tried to emphasize Hanoi's positive approach by saying that North Vietnam was ready to talk about "everything" and therefore discussion of the San Antonio formula could be taken up after a bombing halt. Regarding the role of the National Liberation Front, Bo said that the current effort is directed at opening conversations between Washington and Hanoi and implied that the Front's position and questions concerning the South could be taken up sometime after US - North Vietnamese issues were "negotiated."

This interview has not yet been endorsed as an authoritative commentary on Hanoi's position, and reports on Bo's remarks in it may not be entirely accurate. As reported, however, it goes well beyond previous North Vietnamese statements and strongly suggests that the Communists intend to orchestrate a large campaign to publicize their position and make it appear attractive and reasonable.

Other Communist countries are picking up the theme and expanding their coverage of the Trinh statement. Commentaries in the Soviet press on 18 January cast Trinh's statement in the most favorable light, and one concludes with a strong endorsement of the "actions and steps by the North Vietnamese

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government aimed at a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem." This is the most forthright Soviet statement so far in characterizing the new Trinh statement.

Czechoslovakia published a Foreign Ministry "declaration" on 17 January challenging the US to take the North Vietnamese up on their offer. This is the first official government statement of support for Trinh's statement by a Communist country. The Czech statement also says that Prague supports not only the Trinh offer to talk with the US, but also the "standpoints of the North Vietnamese government and the Front on a settlement of the Vietnamese problem," and that it would continue to furnish Vietnam with both "political and material" support.

The North Vietnamese consul in Rangoon also held a press conference on 18 January to publicize the Trinh offer and to condemn what he called lack of US response to the initiative. According to the French News Agency version of his comments, the consul went on to talk about the San Antonio formula. He said that it would be necessary for the US to guarantee the withdrawal of US troops from South Vietnam before US - North Vietnamese talks could be "productive." Regarding North Vietnamese activity during a period of US restraint, the consul asked, "Why should we use so-called restraint when we did not declare war on the US, which is carrying on an aggressive war against us?" The consul declared that the "two conditions" of the San Antonio formula "show that the US has no good intentions for peace." He went on to reiterate that the bombing must end unconditionally if the US truly wants talks.

* * *

New York Times Promised Interview with Bo: Henry Tanner, Paris bureau chief of the New York Times, informed the US Embassy on Thursday that Mai Van Bo had agreed to give him an interview "in the next few days." Bo asked Tanner to submit questions in advance and Tanner intends to do so today.

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Unwelcome Cuban Present: [redacted]

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[redacted] after the departure of the
French, venereal disease was all but eliminated in
North Vietnam. [redacted]

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Lately, however, venereal disease has been reintroduced into the country "by the Cubans." Authorities are moving quickly, he says, to treat the new cases.

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Hanoi Seeks Free World Trade: North Vietnamese officials continue to pursue free world trade contacts.

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the Vietnamese also attended and attempted to assure [redacted] that North Vietnam's foreign trade commitments would be met in spite of the difficulties caused by the bombings.

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Hanoi has also recently been pushing to open up a trade office in Singapore.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

Hanoi Reports Opposition to Bombing: Hanoi is continuing to report statements by individuals or groups in the US favoring an unconditional cessation of the bombing in response to Foreign Minister Trinh's offer to talk with the US. In a 16 January broadcast beamed to US servicemen in South Vietnam, Hanoi reported that an organization of American business executives on 11 January urged the Johnson administration to consider the new formulation "very seriously" claiming that it "offers an opportunity for a first step on our part to show that we are honest and sincere in seeking a negotiated settlement." The broadcast reported that Harold Williams and Henry Merideith were cochairmen of the group which also included such prominent Americans as former Marine Corps Commandant Shoup, and Rear Admiral Arnold E. True.

The broadcast also reported a call for an end to the bombing by an organization called "American Opposition Abroad" based in Paris.

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